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SUBJECT: Nordic Council Open to Renewable Energy R&D Partnership Idea

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a September 18 courtesy call on the Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), the DCM expressed U.S. interest in dialogue and collaboration in the Arctic and the field of renewable energy. SecGen Halldor Asgrimsson reciprocated that interest, expressing general interest in enhanced cooperation with the U.S., and encouraging dialogue with the NCM in the promising area of renewable energy research. Other Council priorities include Arctic cooperation, and support to civil society in the Baltic states, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On September 18, the DCM, accompanied by ESTHOFF, called on Halldor Asgrimsson, Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers since 2006. Asgrimsson formerly served as Prime Minister of Iceland, 2004-2006; Leader of the Progressive Party, 1994-2006; Chairman of the Arctic Council, 2002-2004; and as Iceland's Minister for Foreign Affairs, External Trade, Defense and Foreign Aid, 1995-2004.

Nordic Council Open to Dialog

¶3. (SBU) Asgrimsson welcomed the opportunity to meet, saying the Nordic prime ministers, led by Norway and Iceland, had at their most recent meeting encouraged the NCM to increase cooperation with the U.S. and other nations, including Canada. He expressed appreciation for U.S. participation in the recent NCM Arctic conference held in Ilulissat, Greenland, September 9-10.

¶4. (SBU) Asgrimsson said the NCM, formed in 1973, had originally focused on coordination within the Nordic region, but since the fall of the Berlin wall had become engaged in efforts to engage the development of the independent Baltic states and Russia. The Council now has correspondent offices in all three Baltic capitals, and in Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg. Its programs also provide support through NGOs to civil society in the Baltics, Ukraine and Belarus, where it supported creation of an independent university (the European Humanities University), which has since moved to Vilnius, Lithuania, becoming the world's first "university in exile."

¶5. (SBU) An NCM globalization initiative is now seeking to engage China and India, and NCM support for a Nordic Climate Solutions conference in Copenhagen in November is focused on the climate change issue.

¶6. (SBU) Asgrimsson said the NCM does not involve itself directly in foreign policy or political issues, but its programs nevertheless

have political ramifications. He mentioned a recent meeting in Moscow with Vice Minister Titov to discuss NCM programs in NW Russia, where the situation in Georgia was not mentioned, but inevitably "cast a pall" over the meeting.

Renewable Energy Research Efforts Promising

¶17. (SBU) The DCM described general U.S. interest in international collaboration to foster renewable energy technology research and development, and growing interest in partnering with the Nordic region in this effort. He inquired whether, should interest on the part of all Nordic nations be confirmed, the NCM would be interested in exploring avenues for collaboration with the U.S. in this particular area.

¶18. (SBU) Asgrimsson said he had been made aware of initial U.S. exploratory efforts in the region, and signaled strong NCM interest in future collaboration in this promising area. The Council supports a Nordic Energy Research effort based in Oslo to fund projects in targeted areas including renewable energy and energy efficiency, and has made important efforts to coordinate bio-energy research through its Forestry Council. The NCM is also considering supporting outreach in the U.S. on the success of the Nordic energy model, at the request of one of its members.

¶19. (SBU) Asgrimsson introduced two of NCM's staff, Kristian Birk, Head of NCM's Energy Department (including renewable energy), and Tryggvi Felixson, Head of NCM's Environment Department (which covers climate change negotiations and bio-energy issues), and suggested we coordinate with them on any next steps.

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Comment

¶10. (SBU) We were careful to present U.S. efforts as preliminary, since not all Nordic states have yet been included, but the NCM is clearly aware of our initial soundings and well disposed to explore the possibility of cooperation further. We defer to the Department on next steps, but believe the Council could offer a useful platform for cooperation with the Nordics as a group.

CAIN